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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
26 January 1973

OCI No. 1418/73

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Security Conditions in Certain Countries of Southeast Asia

No. 1

Summary

Phnom Penh is the only place on the Vice President's itinerary where there is a highly unpredictable security condition. The likelihood of terrorist action or demonstrations against the Vice President in Saigon, Vientiane, or Bangkok is low, although we cannot totally exclude the possibility of a violent act.

Our concern over the Vice President's physical safety in Phnom Penh reflects the Communists' demonstrated capabilities to carry out rocket and sapper attacks and acts of sabotage and terrorism within the capital, as well as the lack of specific intelligence generally required for executing adequate protective measures.

Note: This security memorandum was prepared by CIA. It was produced by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates

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SOUTH VIETNAM

We see a relatively low risk in Saigon. The cease-fire agreement should be going into effect early in the morning on the 28th, and we would consider any deliberate Communist military or terrorist attack on the person of the Vice President unlikely. There is some danger that military or terrorist activity will persist for some hours or days after the cease-fire begins, especially because enemy troops apparently have been ordered to launch last-minute attacks and the security posture will be tense. There has been relatively little terrorism in the Saigon area, however, and almost no direct rocket or mortar attacks on the city itself since the Communists launched their military offensive last spring. While we cannot totally rule out such an incident just prior to the cease-fire, a post-cease-fire spillover against the city or some nearby installation such as Tan Son Nhut Airfield would seem a fairly remote possibility. There will remain a slight danger from accidental triggering of some undetected explosive device in Saigon.

The South Vietnamese Government will make a maximum effort to ensure the Vice President's safety and to prevent any embarrassing incident. South Vietnamese security forces--the army, the national and local police, and various intelligence agencies--have ample trained personnel as well as demonstrated skill and experience in the protection of visiting foreign dignitaries. Moreover, they will already have been on high alert against Communist infiltration or sabotage in the capital area during the days immediately preceding the cease-fire. In addition, US military and security personnel are available in the Saigon area, including Tan Son Nhut.

We believe the South Vietnamese Government will be particularly anxious to demonstrate close friendship with the US, as represented by the Vice President, and to avoid any suggestion of hostility from its supporters or its non-Communist opposition. Although there may be considerable concern among the South Vietnamese population over the impact of the cease-fire agreement and some residual resentment at the US as a result of the demonstrations whipped up against the original October draft, it is currently a primary interest of the Saigon government to make its own adherence to the agreement acceptable to the people and to take the most positive posture officially to justify continued aid and support from the US people and Congress. The non-Communist opposition, while recently aroused by some of President Thieu's actions aimed at

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tightening his control, is almost certainly too relieved at the cease-fire and too wary of playing into Communist hands at this point to instigate any protests or demonstrations in connection with the Vice President's visit. South Vietnamese security forces are, in any event, capable of controlling and dispersing any demonstrations that might occur.

LAOS

There is little reason to expect any security problem in Vientiane. The Lao capital is far removed from the major battlefronts to the north and southeast, and there have been no terrorist incidents in the city since 1965. Any Communist-inspired attempt to harm or embarrass the Vice President would be ill-timed and illogical in view of the ongoing peace talks in Vientiane between government and Lao Communist negotiators. The local constabulary and military security forces make up in numbers what they lack in training and efficiency and can be expected to make a maximum effort to ensure the Vice President's safety.

The chances of a public demonstration against the Vice President are also virtually nil. There are some young malcontents among foreign-educated Lao and the small colony of expatriate western youth, but they are not politically active. Local authorities have shown no reluctance to deal with the few minor civil disturbances that have infrequently occurred in Vientiane. Popular sentiment is generally pro-American and the Vice President will probably enjoy a warm reception.

CAMBODIA

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Most of Cambodia is highly insecure, and the Phnom Penh area is no exception.

[REDACTED] there are now about 6,500 Communist troops operating within a 25-mile radius of Phnom Penh. Khmer insurgents make up the bulk of this force, which also includes a few Vietnamese Communist sapper, artillery and infantry elements. Cambodian military units currently deployed in or around the capital are more than sufficient to contain these forces.

Despite their gradually growing strength in the Phnom Penh region, the Communists still appear to lack the ability

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to launch any large-scale, sustained assaults on the city. In view of their professed intention to go on fighting after the Vietnam cease-fire, they are likely to continue to carry out harassing attacks against outlying government positions and to conduct additional hit-and-run sapper raids and acts of terrorism and sabotage within Phnom Penh itself.

The last major sapper attack in Phnom Penh was on 7 October 1972, when Vietnamese Communist commandos caused considerable damage to one of the city's two major bridges--which is only a few miles from the US Embassy. Government troops reacted quickly and effectively to the attack and killed most of the sappers. Since then, the Communists have carried out several small and ineffectual rocket attacks against Phnom Penh's Pochentong airfield. They have also used frogmen to damage several ships at anchor in the city's port area, and Communist terrorists within Phnom Penh recently have used crude rocket-type devices--with little effect--against such targets as the National Assembly building. They have carried out no attempts against U.S. installations or personnel since last fall, when they narrowly missed killing the U.S. deputy chief of mission.

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There is little likelihood that any hostile demonstrations or embarrassing incidents will occur during the Vice President's visit, owing both to an absence of cohesive non-Communist objections to U.S. policies and to the precautions which the Lon Nol government, in any case, would take to prevent them. Government security services should be able to assure that any demonstrations do not get off the ground, and can be expected to surveil or arrest suspected extremists.

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All of the government's security forces have performed capably in the past in protecting important foreign visitors.

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THAILAND

We see no major security problem in Bangkok. The Vice President's visit will be well received by Thai leaders and the people of the city will probably offer a friendly reception. Thai security forces charged with the protection of the Vice President's party are efficient. The government is most unlikely to authorize any demonstrations by students or others; if any should occur they will probably attract few participants and be quickly quashed. The Communist insurgencies in the hinterland have so far had no impact on the security situation in the capital.

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